

**Amendment to the Claims:**

The following listing of claims replaces all previous versions and listings of claims:

1-20. (canceled).

21. (New) A method for monitoring the presence of a web client from a server via a communications network, comprising:

conducting searches for data in response to receiving requests for information from web clients; and

upon sensing that one of the searches will be time consuming, determining a continued presence of the web client associated with the time-consuming search, the determining comprising:

transmitting a byte stream to the web client;

waiting a specified time period;

if an error response is returned from the web client indicating the web client is no longer present, aborting the search; and

if an error response is not returned from the web client, continuing the search and repeating the transmitting and waiting until an occurrence of at least one of:

an error response is returned from the web client indicating the web client is no longer present; and

data resulting from the search becomes available.

22. (New) The method of claim 21, further comprising transmitting data resulting from the search to the web client in response to the occurrence of data resulting from the search becoming available.

23. (New) The method of claim 21, wherein the byte stream is a null byte stream.

24. (New) The method of claim 21, wherein the byte stream is an advertisement.

25. (New) The method of claim 21, wherein the specified wait time is a tunable parameter.
26. (New) The method of claim 21, wherein the data to be searched is returned in a web page format.
27. (New) The method of claim 21, further comprising returning a static web page to the web client in response to receiving the request for information from the web client.
28. (New) The method of claim 21, wherein the static web page is returned to a second browser window opened by the web client, the second browser window opened by the web client subsequent to the request.
29. (New) A storage medium encoded with machine-readable computer program code for monitoring the presence of a web client from a server via a communications network, the storage medium including instructions for causing a computer to implement a method comprising:
  - conducting searches for data in response to receiving requests for information from web clients; and
  - upon sensing that one of the searches will be time consuming, determining a continued presence of the web client associated with the time-consuming search, the determining comprising:
    - transmitting a byte stream to the web client;
    - waiting a specified time period;
    - if an error response is returned from the web client indicating the web client is no longer present, aborting the search; and
    - if an error response is not returned from the web client, continuing the search and repeating the transmitting and waiting until an occurrence of at least one of:

an error response is returned from the web client indicating the web client is no longer present; and data resulting from the search becomes available.

30. (New) The storage medium of claim 29, further comprising instructions for performing:

transmitting data resulting from the search to the web client in response to the occurrence of data resulting from the search becoming available.

31. (New) The storage medium of claim 29, wherein the byte stream is a null byte stream.

32. (New) The storage medium of claim 29, wherein the byte stream is an advertisement.

33. (New) The storage medium method of claim 29, wherein the specified wait time is a tunable parameter.

34. (New) The storage medium of claim 29, wherein the data to be searched is returned in a web page format.

35. (New) The storage medium of claim 29, further comprising returning a static web page to the web client in response to receiving the request for information from the web client.

36. (New) The storage medium of claim 29, wherein the static web page is returned to a second browser window opened by the web client, the second browser window opened by the web client subsequent to the request.